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C O N F I D E N T I A L ATHENS 01400

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [MOPS](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [TU](#) [GR](#)
SUBJECT: GREECE/NATO: GREECE WITHDRAWS FROM NATO AEGEAN
TABLE TOP EXERCISE

REF: ATHENS 966

Classified By: DCM Deborah McCarthy for reasons 1.4
(b and d)

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) Greece informed NATO military authorities October 6 that it has withdrawn from a NATO table top exercise ("Noble Aspect 08") on the Aegean. Greece sought to include "tracks" of a civilian aircraft overflying Agios Efstratios island (reftel) - an island that Turkey maintains is "demilitarized." NATO authorities demurred on this request. "Noble Aspect 08" was scheduled to commence October 7, 2008. End Summary.

Greece's Withdrawal

¶2. (C) In an October 6 letter from Lieutenant General Athanasios Karamitsos to LTG Lee McFann (U.S.), Commander of NATO's Southern Air Coordination Center (CC-AIR IZMIR), Karamitsos states that Greece's "national assets are not available to support this year's exercise" (Note: NATO military authorities have regularly carried out a Fall table top exercise related to the Aegean. End note). Karamitsos' letter refers to a July 2008 visit to Athens by CC-AIR Commander LTG McFann (reftel), in which the Greeks raised NATO's decision not to support a May 2008 Greek-proposed exercise in Aegean that would have overflowed Agios Efstratios ("Noble Archer"). The Greek letter states that Greece had expressed "concerns" about the issue of overflights of Agios Efstratios to McFann during this visit. Given that Greece had "not received any feedback to indicate that the planning of the exercise has been amended to reflect our operational concerns," Greece will not support the exercise.

¶3. (C) We understand that in preparations for the exercise, the Greeks submitted "tracks" that would include a civilian aircraft overflying Agios Efstratios island - which Turkey asserts is demilitarized. NATO practice has been not to support exercises that involve disputed areas. Reftel provides additional background on the Agios Efstratios issue, including USG suggestions that Turkish claims related to Agios Efstratios appear specious. NATO authorities demurred on including the Greek "tracks" in the exercise.

¶4. (C) Comment: Per reftel, the Greeks received no assurance from CC-AIR Commander McFann that he would revisit NATO's practice of not supporting exercises and activities

involving overflights of Agios Efstratios island or other locations that Turkey claims are either demilitarized or of uncertain sovereignty. Rather, in his meetings, McFann was direct with his Greek interlocutors that this was a "political problem" and that Greece needed to address it by consulting with NATO political authorities; he also recommended that Greece seek written guidance from NATO political authorities prior to seeking further NATO support for any activity overflying Agios Efstratios (or any other Aegean area under dispute). We are not aware of any Greek attempt to raise these issues with NATO political authorities since the McFann visit; however, the Greeks have again raised their concerns with SACEUR Craddock during his July visit to Greece. The Greeks continue to be concerned that NATO's policy not to support NATO activities in areas that Turkey has identified as "disputed," even when that claim is fairly specious - as in the case of Agios Efstratios - creates an increasingly elastic "no fly" area for NATO and Greece. Greek military commanders have also expressed concerns that Greece's ability to be prepared to defend the Aegean is affected. Greece's withdrawal from "Noble Aspect 08" may become a public story in Greece. Should this occur, although this was a NATO and not/not a USG decision, the Greek public is likely equate the United States with NATO and criticize the United States. End Comment.

SPECKHARD